

STATEMENT OF RALPH R. BARTELSMEYER, ACTING
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR, U.S. DEPART-
MENT OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION, REGARDING THE HIGHWAY
SAFETY ACT OF 1973, MARCH 7, 1973

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

It is a pleasure to appear before your Committee to discuss the highway safety legislation. It was this Committee that conceived the Highway Safety Act of 1966 and has provided the Nation with leadership in an area of vital concern to every American. Highway safety is one of the major concerns of the Department of Transportation. We believe that in the very few years in which the Department has been involved in implementing the Highway Safety Act, there has been a general increase in highway safety. Reducing the number of fatal accidents, nonfatal accidents with their tragic loss of limbs, disfigurement, pain and suffering and untold millions of dollars in property damage will continue to be a major concern for this Department and for officials at all levels of government.

This morning I would like to comment on H. R. 2332. Although the general objectives of this bill are quite laudable, we differ with its approach.

H. R. 2332 establishes five new categorical grant-in-aid programs -- elimination of railway/highway grade crossings,

pavement marking, elimination of roadside obstacles, projects for high hazard locations, and bridge replacement -- each with its own separate authorization, its own separate purpose, and its own distribution mechanism. At a time when the States and the Federal Government are recognizing the need to broaden Federal programs by consolidating them and to provide the maximum flexibility consistent with getting the job done, this bill goes fully in the opposite direction. We should encourage the States to establish programs based on their own highway safety priorities. In one State, bridge reconstruction might be the most sensible route toward improved safety. Another State may need grade crossing improvements. Finally, a third State might best meet its safety problems through the general upgrading and reconstruction of its rural road system. This bill does not permit such an approach. Rather, it requires that to use Federal money available under this program, a State must establish its programs in accordance with federally-determined priorities. We do not believe that the outcome under such a program necessarily would be a major increase in safety. The only outcome that would be certain from this program would be a major increase in Federal spending.

In addition, this bill would authorize general funds for various construction programs off the Federal-aid

systems. While there are needs off the Federal-aid system, it is important to recognize that almost 70 percent of the Nation's traffic is carried on the Federal-aid systems, but that this system accounts for less than 25 percent of the Nation's total highway mileage. The reason for establishing Federal-aid systems is to insure that funds are concentrated where the most traffic is carried and where the largest pay-offs exist. To authorize money now for off-system construction under Federal management would be a mistake. The 1970 Highway Act increased the Federal share of the cost of projects from 50 percent to 70 percent. This increased Federal share goes into effect when fiscal year 1974 funds become available. The major justification for this increase was that it would free State funds for use on or off Federal-aid systems. Thus, the Federal-aid program would not tie up a very significant portion of State funds and have a harmful effect on State roads not on a Federal-aid system. We believe that this is the most sensible and reasonable way to meet needs off the Federal-aid system and thus oppose the establishment of the above mentioned five categorical grant programs authorizing general funds for off-system construction.

We also feel that off-system roads can be accommodated by an extension of the States' ongoing programs. In our

standard areas the trend has been that the States are doing more at the local level, for example, in one mid-western State, of 22 Statewide projects to survey and identify highway accident locations, 16 were city and county administered. We foresee that this will continue. Certainly the Department wants to encourage more State and local participation in local projects.

We must also concern ourselves with the optimum benefit from the expenditure of Federal funds. The President is committed to keep the Federal expenditures and the Federal budget down to a level that is not inflationary. We would oppose increases of the magnitude as proposed in H. R. 2332.

Now I would like to comment specifically on some of the provisions of H. R. 2332. Section 105 provides a categorical grant for a special pavement marking program on all highways other than the Interstate System. Priority is to be given to projects located in rural areas which are either on the secondary or not included in any Federal-aid system. Pavement marking, both on and off the Federal-aid system, we believe, should generally remain a maintenance responsibility of the State and local jurisdictions.

Pavement markings are temporary in nature, lasting on the average only about 12 months. For effectiveness

they must be replaced regularly. In most cases, their replacement is a phase of the total maintenance effort.

H. R. 2332 would authorize a number of studies which we urge the Committee to defer because we are presently engaged in active programs in most of these study areas under the general authorizations of section 307(a). Also, the funding of several studies in H. R. 2332 -- pavement marking, drug use and driver behavior, highway safety education programming, citizen participation, feasibility of a National Center for Statistical Analysis of Highway Operations, and pedestrian safety -- amounting to \$96 million, is in excess of that required for effective research and development programs.

H. R. 2332 also calls for nine separate reports to be prepared and submitted to the Congress within the next 1-1/2 years. About one-half of these reports call for annual supplements, some of which include an analysis and evaluation of "before-and-after" conditions. While we recommend against these studies, if these sections are enacted, we suggest that they be staggered and that the time be extended for reports other than progress reports. This will permit time for analysis, evaluation, and cost effectiveness studies. The Department urges that these reporting obligations be reduced. The degree of reporting required by H. R. 2332 is contrary to the general demand for a reduction in "red tape."

While the highway safety program is not a new program, it is for all intents and purposes still in its formative stages. Although it was not intended to be a demonstration program, during its first six years the program has operated at relatively low funding levels. We are gaining the experience to better evaluate the program. Until we have a better understanding of the needs and priorities, we recommend against a massive increase in the safety authorizations.

Certainly, the purposes of the proposed programs and studies in H. R. 2332 are laudable. However, we prefer to continue the existing highway safety programs for at least two more years, during which we will be conducting an intensive evaluation of the efficiency of the present program. We have had doubts, as I am sure this Committee also has, as to whether the safety program has focused on the proper areas. If, after this intensive evaluation, we determine that statutory changes are necessary, we will request legislative authority with respect to the highway safety program. As Mr. Wilson indicated in his statement, the Department will be submitting to you shortly a bill providing for the continuation of the program during this period.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views. I will be happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittee may have.

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